

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



Lakewood: Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs: Brian Mhlbachler, Biological Scientist, Diane Strohm, Biological Scientist, Greg Speights, Biological Technician, Steve Wallace, Forestry Technician

Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora: Krystal Phillips, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

US Army Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo: Max Canestorp, Natural and Cultural Resources Manager

Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park: Chris Kennedy, Fish Biologist

August 2012 Accomplishment Report

Leadership in Science and Technology

Senator Udall hearing on CO wildfires: Diane Strohm attended a hearing on the Colorado wildfire situation. A committee of technical experts provided testimony and discussion on recent wildfires within the state, specifically focusing on lessons learned that can be applied to future suppression, recovery and mitigation efforts.



Ornate box turtle found on Pueblo Chemical Depot

Max Canestorp prepared an article for Pueblo Chemical Depot's (PCD) quarterly newsletter, The Environmental Monitor, about the people who lived in the PCD area prior to settlement by Euro-Americans.

Pam Sponholtz attended the American Fisheries Society (AFS) Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, MN and officially became a member of the Governing Board for AFS as the Western Division AFS Vice-President.

Partnerships and Accountability

Environmental Quality Control Council (EQCC): Max Canestorp participated in the quarterly PCD EQCC meeting and presented updates on the Natural and Cultural Resource Management Programs on the installation.

PCD 70th birthday celebration: Max Canestorp participated in planning meetings and actions for PCD's 70th birthday celebration to be held in September and helped develop a timeline of PCD's history in preparation for the event.

Wildland Fire Management Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): Diane Strohm has drafted an updated five-year MOU between USFWS and US Air Force Academy (USFA) which documents the responsibilities and protocols by which each agency will support the other in fuel hazard mitigation and

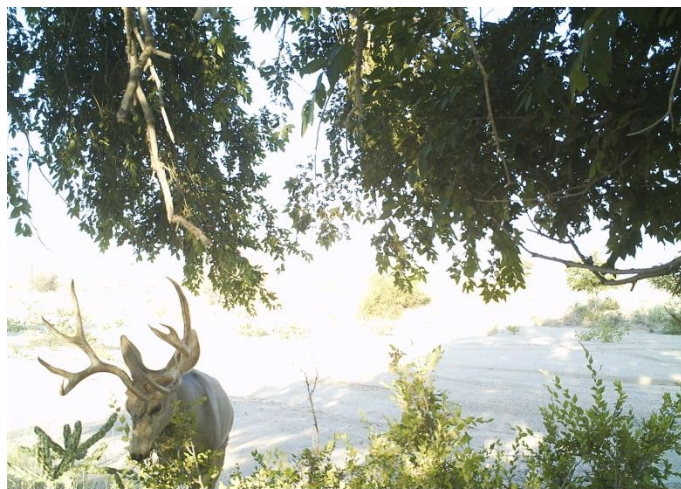
wildland fire suppression. The MOU is in review, with signatures expected by Sept 30, 2012.

Colorado Springs Stormwater Task Force: Brian Mihlbachler attended a kick-off meeting of the Colorado Springs Stormwater Task Force which is reaching out to partners to identify and address regional stormwater needs and maintenance issues. USAFA will play a prominent role on the taskforce as an affected party and large landowner in the upper Fountain Creek watershed.

Stream restoration projects: Brian Mihlbachler provided a tour for the City of Colorado Springs Engineering Department on stream restoration projects on USAFA and highlighted other areas where off-base stormwater mismanagement is causing current or potential impacts to Department of Defence property.

Species Conservation and Management

Stream corridor monitoring: Max Canestorp installed trail cameras along Chico Creek at PCD to assess use of the creek bed as a travel corridor by people and animals.



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Male mule deer captured via trail camera using Chico Creek on PCD

Rare seed collection: Brian Mihlbachler partnered with the Colorado Natural Heritage Program and the U.S. Forest Service to collect seed of the rare Porter feathergrass (*Ptilagrostis porteri*) at Farish Recreation Area at USAFA. The Forest Service will test the viability and germinability of the seed and use field sowing and greenhouse transplants to attempt to introduce the species into new areas.



Brian Mihlbachler, COFWCO, collecting Porter feathergrass seed at Farish Recreation Area.

Native trout monitoring: Chris Kennedy conducted hook-and-line and/or gill net surveys on 3 lakes within Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). Fish were found to be abundant in all lakes. Whole fish samples were collected from each of the lakes surveyed for a mercury study. There is some evidence that fish within RMNP may contain above normal levels of mercury and this study looks to assess concentrations within fish from various species and geographic locations within RMNP. The study is being conducted by the NPS Air Resources Division and the USGS.

Chris Kennedy conducted preliminary work on four streams within RMNP with an eye on converting them to native greenback cutthroat trout restoration waters. Activities included mapping backwaters where fish may hide during a chemical reclamation, waters flows, pH readings and temperature monitoring.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Brian Mihlbachler coordinated with military trainers to specify the use of wildlife-friendly fencing (smooth wire, proper wire spacing, etc.) for an upcoming project to fence the outer limits of the firing range's safety zone on the USAFA.

Pam Sponholtz and Scott Roth participated in a site visit to Kinney Creek near Grandby, CO to evaluate a potential fish passage project.



Scott Roth (Fish Passage/WNTI coordinator) evaluating Kinney Creek's invertebrates

Waldo Canyon fire restoration: Diane Strohm has compiled a contract for forestry restoration work following the Waldo Canyon Fire. Numerous trees felled by dozers creating fuelbreaks are being removed to facilitate erosion control and reseeding efforts. These

trees have already been attacked by the Ips pine engraver beetle, which is attracted to dying and recently downed trees. They are being hauled back to the Natural Resources woodlot to be peeled to kill beetle larvae, and will be sold as firewood. Revenues support the Academy forestry program.

Brian Mihlbachler prepared a Scope of Work and conducted a pre-bid site tour with contractors interested in the upcoming work for erosion control and restoration of the firelines created during the Waldo Canyon Fire.

Fuelbreak planning: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm met with representatives from the Academy Fire Department to identify key fuelbreak locations in preparation for future wildfires. Steve will be following up on this with field reconnaissance, with clearing expected to begin in late September.

Fuel mitigation planning around Munitions Storage Site: Diane Strohm flagged a four-acre fuel mitigation unit to address special wildland fuel concerns in this area. Defensible space will be expanded through removal of trees, lower limbs and brush. The first phase of brush removal has started, with completion expected by the end of September.

Pam Sponholtz and Scott Roth visited the Gunnison River near Delta, CO to evaluate the Relief Ditch project which hopes to reduce fish entrainment.



Bark beetle surveys and management: Steve Wallace continued to focus on field surveys to locate infested brood trees on the USAFA. Two sizable pockets of Ips pine engraver beetle infestation have been found, with trees immediately cut and debarked and branches chipped to annihilate developing insects. Ips and twig beetle populations pose an increasing issue due to continued extreme drought conditions. Aggressive management to locate and treat infested trees has been critical in limiting insect spread and tree mortality.

Dwarf mistletoe control: Natural Resources staff on the USAFA salvaged approximately 150 trees by removing mistletoe-infected limbs. Pruning limits the spread of this parasitic plant, which weakens trees and predisposes them to insect attack. Seeds are expelled in late summer, spreading the plant to adjacent trees.



Pruning mistletoe-infected limbs at the USAFA

Cultural Resources

ROMEO Club photo ID project: Max Canestorp initiated a project wherein retired PCD employees, members of the ROMEO (Retired Old Men Eating Out) Club, will review historic photographs of depot activities and help identify people and actions during one of their weekly breakfast get-togethers.

Brian Mihlbachler re-located cultural resource sites within the Waldo Canyon Fire burn scar to determine if any resources had been impacted during the firefighting operations. No resources were damaged.

Brian Mihlbachler visited cultural resources sites with tribal elders from the Oglala Sioux tribe during a USAFA Native American consultation. He also re-identified other cultural resource sites that were visited by tribal elders during a consultation with the Cherokee Nation.

Public Use and Recreation

Natural Resources staff stocked rainbow trout at USAFA at the Farish Recreation Area in support of the recreational fishing program.